

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM.

It is generally supposed that Socialism and Communism are newly-invented modes of regenerating society: that they are modern ideas, testifying at once the perpetual yearning of man after a change in the social state, and his attempts towards its perfection. It is not generally known that this sovereign remedy for all social ills is extensively practised and is already some centuries old in one of the oldest and perhaps the least progressive of the countries of Europe—Russia. Arguments, to be sure, are not wanting to show theoretically that socialism and communism are in their very nature opposed to liberty and social progress among a people; but practical illustration is more convincing than theoretic argument. Let such, then, as are inclined to adopt socialism and communism as the means of promoting the well-being of modern society, ask themselves if they are willing to take Russia as a model; if they are willing to advance as Russia is advancing toward civil, political, and social perfection? The following account of socialism and communism in Russia is evidently prepared by a friendly hand; but it furnishes conclusive evidence that the boasted remedy, so far from healing social evils and promoting a healthful vigorous action of the social energies, producing amelioration and progress, has just the opposite effect; that it produces a complete stagnation of those energies, and maintains a life that is only just not dead.

The facts are drawn, as follows, by a correspondent at Paris, from the works on Russia published by GEORGI, ERDMAN, and DE HARTIAUSSEN:

The Russian peasant was not formerly, as now, the Serf of the Lord, but was simply the Farmer of his lands. Serfdom existed only for the descendants of former prisoners of war, who composed the numerous class of *Dorogovs*, or servants. The inhabitant of the rural districts was free on St. George's Day to quit the domain which had been farmed out to him, and which he had cultivated for years, and to go and reside in any part of the empire he pleased. This privilege of continual change of residence, alarming the *Serfs* as to the interests of agriculture, was afterwards limited by severe ordinances, which, though recognizing the right of the laborer to quit one lord for another, prohibited him from moving into another principality.

When the feudal system was destroyed in Russia by the sword of the Tartars, and under the supremacy of the princes of Moscow, the regulations made by the great private *Serfs* fell with themselves.

The peregrinations of the peasants recommenced then with more ardor than ever, and the population migrated in a mass towards the navigable rivers and streams, which afforded greater facilities for a market. On the 21st November, 1601, the Czar Boris GODUNOFF issued an ukase abolishing forever the right of change of residence, and confined the peasants to the glebe in which they were living on the last day of the journey.

Placed from this time under the sovereignty of the lords, the peasants remained, nevertheless, personally free. It was not until the reign of Peter I. that they became veritable *serfs de facto*, and even then the servitude was not established by any positive law.

From this epoch the lord regarded the peasant as his personal property, and made all the profit out of him which he could. Sometimes he established the *corvée*, (forced labor on the estate,) but more generally he ceded lands to his serfs in consideration of a certain cash rent. This annual rent, the amount of which was fixed by the lord himself, was more or less onerous, according to the cupidity or injustice of the proprietor. This system of impost, visited collectively on the whole population of the domain, engendered and developed a communal organization.

The united inhabitants of a manorial estate constituted a little republic, administered by themselves, and having no obligation except that of paying the *obrok*, or collective rent.

The Russian commune was at first an association purely agricultural; but when Peter I. introduced European industry into his empire, both sovereign and lords appropriated whole villages to particular branches of manufacture, and thus laid the foundation of the industrial commune. We propose to examine these different communes in order.

The most important and interesting, beyond doubt, the rural commune. This remarkable political institution is based upon this great principle of Slavonic law—the indivisibility of the family estate, and the division of the usufruct.

Whether the commune be free and possess property in its own right, (which is the case among all the Cossacks,) or whether the tenure be more or less limited, as in the domains of the Crown, and in the manorial possessions, the landed property is considered as belonging to the community at large, and not to the respective members who cultivate it.

This idea of possession, common to all people of Slavonic origin, exists intact and in its primitive state, even to the present day, certain parts of Servia, Croatia, and Slavonia, where, according to M. HARTHAUSSEN, the land is not even divided, but remains under the supervision of the old inhabitants. The commune, who divide and distribute the aggregate product of the harvest.

In the Russian commune the spirit of communism is not carried so far. The land there is divided, and every male inhabitant has the right to claim for his share the usufruct of the empire, for the purpose of ascertaining the exact number of inhabitants liable to personal taxation and military service. The year when this census is taken is by law the year for dividing the lands of the commune. This division is conducted as follows:

Each commune has its land surveyors, persons of experience and integrity, who estimate, by precise and exact statement of the quantity of land to be divided. This operation finished, they estimate the different parts of which it is composed, according to their fertility and their products, and then divide them into as many lots as there are single claimants in the community; so that each one has, as he is entitled to, a portion of land, in quantity proportioned to its intrinsic value. This apportionment takes place by lot; and such is the equity which has hitherto prevailed that it hardly ever happens that any one is dissatisfied. For the rest a reserved portion of the land is always set aside to meet any reclamation which may afterwards be made, and at the death of any member his part is added to this reserve.

This system of continual partition, peculiar to the Russian commune, possesses the immense advantage of rendering hereditary poverty impossible. If the father raises a family, whether by his own fault or by misfortune, the son is not less entitled to his portion of land; he is not compelled to suffer in any way from the error or negligence of his parents. Thus the proletracy, that plague of ancient and modern society, is in Russia unknown.

In both the mode of possession and of culture the Russian commune are subject to two distinct regimes. Most of the communes are regarded as *free communes*, and the proprietors of the soil. They cultivate the whole of it, and receive the entire product, excepting only enough to pay the annual *obrok* or rent agreed upon with the lord of the manor. This rent once paid, the commune is mistress of itself, and manages its own affairs as it pleases.

But there are communes too poor to pay the rent, and where the proprietor finds it for his interest to treat with his serfs in an entirely different manner. These communes are subjected to the *corvée*; in other words, the lord retains a quarter of the produce of the village, and compels the serfs to cultivate it on his account, in consideration of the use of the rest, which he abandons to them.

It will readily be perceived that such a system must lead to innumerable abuses. To counteract the most serious results of this arbitrary regime, the Government has fixed the maximum time which the lord has the right to exact from his serfs at three days per week. From this essential difference in the mode of possession arises an equally important difference in the mode of allotment.

All the members of the commune which pay the *obrok*, or annual rent—in fact all the commune which is not subjected to the *corvée*—are entitled to a portion of the land. The father has the right to demand this portion in the name

of his son who is under age, and it is accorded to him; but each lot is subject to a partial rent. This arrangement the family which possesses three or four lots pays a rent three or four times as large as the possessor of but a single lot. In a word, the rent is proportioned to the quantity of land which is held. On the other hand, in the villages under the *corvée* regime, the principle is entirely different. It is not a question of ceding more or less land according to the number of males in the family, but of allowing so much land for so much work; that a strong and vigorous man, if he is able to perform two or three times as much work as a feeble neighbor, may possess twice or thrice as much soil. The young, the aged, the unfortunate, by the simple fact of their inability to work, are excluded from any claim to the manorial lands. Such is the principle on which rests the territorial distribution.

In order to encourage marriages in a country which is deficient in population, it is provided that each new family shall have a right to a portion of the soil. As soon as a man marries he becomes a legitimate claimant, and the commune immediately concedes to him the lot of land which before he refused him. Thus in Russia the single peasant is almost unknown.

For the rest, whatever mode of apportionment is adopted, and whether the peasants pay the yearly rent, or are subject to the *corvée*, each one possesses, in principle at least, an equal right to the usufruct of the land, which is divided among the members of the commune, but not the property of all the members of the commune. This is the basis of the institution.

Let us now pass to the administrative organization of the commune. Every village has for its chief the *starosta*, or elder, who is elected by universal suffrage. The *starosta* is chosen by ten heads of families. According to rule, he should only continue in office one month; but the custom prevails of replacing him only once a year. The *starosta* receives a salary amounting to 186 bank-rubles, or about \$34 per year. The service of the assistants is gratuitous.

The rural commune is composed of five or six fathers of families, and includes several villages. The head of the commune is the *starosta*, or oldest chief, so called because formerly that office was the prescriptive right of the oldest member of the commune. But now he is elected by a convention composed of two deputies from each village. The *starosta* receives pay from sixty to eighty dollars per year.

The tribute of the Volost is formed of several communes, and is presided over by the *globova*, or jurisdiction. He is assisted by two of his deputies. If no complaint is made against him during his term of office, he is re-eligible; but in any case his election must be confirmed by the Governor of the Province, who pronounces his decision after receiving the report of the *starosta* and the *globova*, who is employed in the Crown. The *starosta*, or chief of the commune, assisted by two of his deputies, keeps cognizance of cases in which the amount in dispute does not exceed five silver rubles, or about four dollars. The greatest corporal punishment he can inflict is twenty-five blows with the switch.

In each commune the *globova* extends only to cases where the amount in litigation is not more than about twelve dollars. When an appeal is made to this tribunal, it can only pronounce a mitigation of the previous sentence; but cannot in any case increase the penalty. Nevertheless, if the judgment of the *starosta* appears to have been too lenient, it has the right to refer the case to the chief of the arrondissement.

Such is in brief the organization of the Russian communes, whether they belong to the lords, or whether they originate directly from the Crown.

Without doubt there are many partial variations in the manorial estates, and the administration of the commune is far from being everywhere the same; but we have faithfully reported the general rule as emanating from the Government.

It will easily be understood that in a vast country like Russia, inhabited by a people of so many different nations, perfect uniformity in the local administrative manners or customs. The *Tscheremisses*, for example, who originated in Finland, govern themselves in their own fashion, although subject to the Czar. Located on the line of the Volga, in the neighborhood of Tartary, they have their peculiar customs, and modified by their religious ideas. Two or three of these villages, containing ten, twenty, or thirty houses, compose a commune which is called *Kere-meth*, the same name formerly given to their places of sacrifice.

Each village has a chief chosen among the wisest and most respected men of the commune. This chief is called *kabakhan*. He has under his orders the *abakari*, who are secondary magistrates, elected to maintain order and tranquillity. A supreme *kabakhan* is like the head of the nation; he directs, administers, governs. This administration is likewise together the French *tribun*, the French *tribun*, French *Guiana*, and Isle of Bourbon. It equals the aggregate amount of that trading to Portugal, Madeira, the Azores, the Cape de Verd Islands, Italy, Sicily, Trieste, and all the other Austrian ports and Turkey. It exceeds by more than twenty thousand tons the trade which the Atlantic and Mediterranean seas of Spain, and double that trading with France on the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic together the French West Indies, the French Guiana, and Isle of Bourbon. 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